



The Steven A. Cohen  
Military Family Clinic  
at Easterseals



# Addressing the Unique Mental Health Challenges Facing Women Veterans

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# Prevalence of Women Veterans

- The US has over 2 million women veterans. Of these:
  - One in four women veterans experience military sexual trauma
  - Female veterans are 4x more likely to be homeless than nonveteran women (Hamilton, 2011)
  - They are six times more likely to die by suicide than women who did not serve

# Women at War

- Women in the military have an increasing role
  - 15% of active duty US military
  - 17% reserve and National Guard
  - 20% of new recruits
- Women serving in the military may come under direct fire and experience combat-related injuries and trauma
- Women may also be subject to sexual assault and harassment
  - In addition, some may have experienced trauma prior to service

# Stressful Military Experiences

- Combat Experiences
- Military Sexual Trauma
  - Reported by 20-40% of female veterans (Kelly, et al, 2011)
- Separation From Family
  - Deployments
  - Unaccompanied Tours
  - Frequent Moves (away from extended family)
- Reintegration/Readjustment Issues

# Women Veterans Mental Health

- Women veterans have an higher incidence of substance use disorder (SUD) – (Booth, et al, 2011)
  - Lifetime SUD is higher for women veterans with a history of sexual assault (64% vs 44%)
- High rates of positive post traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety
  - MST combined with combat exposure increases incidence and impacts civilian readjustment

# Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

- Experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a veteran experienced during his or her military service
- Per VA data, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 100 men have reported experiencing MST
- MST is an experience, not a diagnosis, so treatment needs will vary

# Barriers to Care

- Access
- Social Stigma
- Cost
- Quality of Care
- Scheduling/Traffic
- Childcare

*\* These all contribute to access disparities*

# Access to Care

- *The perception of limited ability to be seen may be influenced in part by unacceptable wait times to receive mental health services (CVN & NCBH, Oct 2018)*
- Lack of access to mental health services may discourage people from seeking help



# Access to Care

- *Patients are also spending significant amounts of time traveling to/from their appointment(CVN & NCBH, Oct 2018)*
  - *Nearly half (46% of American adults have had to or know someone who has had to travel more than 1 hour roundtrip to receive mental health treatment*



# Barriers

- Cost
  - Primary barrier to getting mental health services
  - Not all veterans have healthcare benefits or coverage may be limited
- Limited options & lack of awareness
  - *Difficulty finding military culturally competent clinicians*
  - *Few services specific to women veterans*
- Social Stigma
  - Warrior Mentality/Perception of Weakness
- Inability to take off from Work

***HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THESE  
CHALLENGES?***

# Holistic Care: Eight Dimensions of Wellness



# Evidence-Based Therapies

- Prolonged Exposure Therapy
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Motivational Interviewing
- Problem Solving Therapy
- Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization Therapy

# Types of Services – Comprehensive Care

- Individual Counseling
- Couples Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Case Management
- Telehealth
- Medication Management
- Peer to Peer Support Groups
- Skill-Building Workshops/Groups
  - Parenting Workshops
  - Stress Resiliency Classes

# Ecosystem of Services

- Respite Care
- Inclusive Child Development Centers
  - Provide physical, occupational, and speech therapy in the natural environment
  - *“Little Warriors Program”*
- Adult Day Services
- Veteran Staffing Network
  - Career Coaching
  - Job Placement & Recruiting
- ***The key is utilization of community resources***

# Family-Friendly Spaces





# Warm Inviting Settings



# Resources

- Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals:  
[www.mfc.eseal.org](http://www.mfc.eseal.org)
- Cohen Veterans Network:  
[www.cohenveteransnetwork.org](http://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org)
- Maryland's Commitment to Veterans:  
[www.veterans.health.Maryland.gov](http://www.veterans.health.Maryland.gov)
- National Council for Behavioral Health:  
[www.thenationalcouncil.org](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

# Resources

- National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention  
[www.theactionalliance.org](http://www.theactionalliance.org)
- Veterans Benefits Administration  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)
- Vets4Warriors: [www.vets4warriors.com](http://www.vets4warriors.com)
  - 1-855-838-8255
- VA Suicide Hotline
  - 1800-273-8255